

## METEOROLOGY

# Waterless Season Disaster

Farmers in Middle Rio Grande region, usually heavily irrigated, face prospect of no water in July and August. Rain and snow only 43% of normal.

► THOUSANDS of farmers in the heavily-irrigated Middle Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico today face a virtually waterless season.

With a second consecutive year of drought shaping up, expected Rio Grande runoff now is estimated at about 30% of normal. Water behind key dams is dangerously low or almost gone.

This means that if the drought goes on, the 80,000-odd Middle Valley acres will have no water in July and August, the heavy irrigating season, and that water for the lush cotton lands in southern New Mexico and west Texas will be severely short.

The badly needed rain and snow between last Oct. 1 and the start of March was only 43% of normal.

The critical situation, part of general dryness in the Southwest, also brought these developments:

1. There's a likelihood of a second consecutive wheat failure in eastern New Mexico and Colorado, western edge of the dust bowl of the 30's.

2. Farmers and ranchers have banded together to hire commercial rainmakers in the hope of getting relief, despite the cries of others that the rainmakers may have caused the present situation.

3. The Budget Bureau has approved a \$2,000,000 appropriation for relief-aimed emergency work on the already Congress-approved \$73,000,000 Middle Rio Grande Project.

Directors of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, heart of the troubled

area, have told water users to plant for the summer season at their own risk. Damage to permanent crops such as orchards and alfalfa is feared.

They advised farmers to drill wells to supplement the short water supply, and hundreds were being sunk along the river with no certain knowledge of the effects on underground water tables.

The directors also asked for a scientific investigation of the effect of rainmaking on moisture conditions. The rainmakers, criticized from several sides, have denied that their operations caused the present situation.

In eastern New Mexico and Colorado, the situation boils down to how soon moisture will come and what the intensity of the now beginning seasonal winds will be.

Except for a few areas, the winter wheat must have moisture within no more than 30 days to live. The situation is complicated in New Mexico by infestations of cut worms, aphids and greenbugs.

It is successive wheat failures that cause dust bowls, and so emergency tilling to discourage wind erosion already has begun.

But Soil Conservation Service spokesmen said the needed moisture may come in time. They expressed belief that if the worst happens, farmers' knowledge of soil-saving practices will help control the situation.

With prospects for good ranges and crops evaporating along with remaining moisture, farmers and ranchers have contracted for rainmaking activities over almost the entire state.

Associations usually are formed to raise what is said to be sometimes as much as \$25,000 to hire rainmakers, who "salt" moisture-bearing clouds with chemicals to cause rain over certain areas.

The \$2,000,000 appropriation for the Middle Valley would be used to dredge a channel through a 10,000-acre swamp land in central New Mexico where water-hungry salt cedars sponge up much water.

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